

# Wings in Water



A huge, flat creature leaps out of the sea. It skims over the waves and flips backward with a splash. Could this be a fish? Yes. It is a **manta ray**.

These diamond-shaped giants live in warm oceans. They can be 22 feet wide and weigh as much as a small car—up to 3,000 pounds.

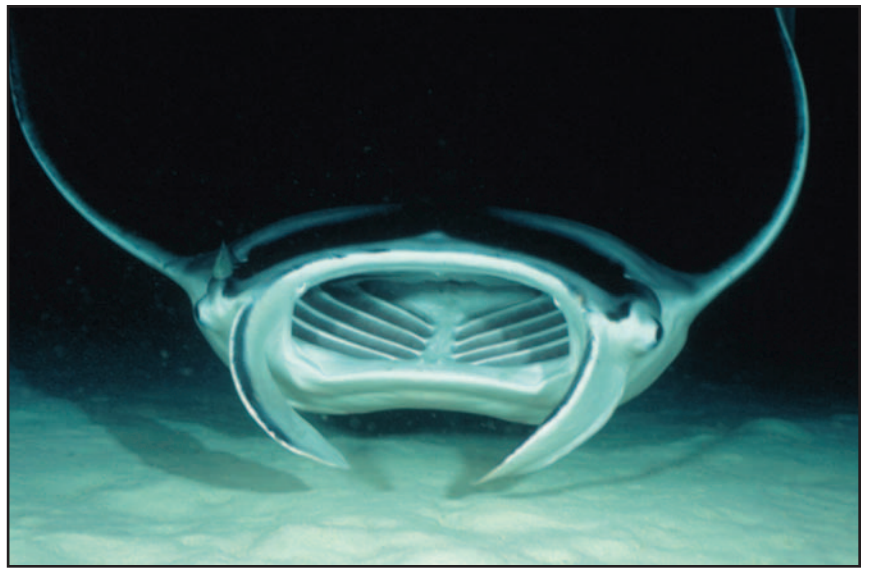
## **Speed Swimmer**

Their skeletons are made of soft bone called **cartilage**. This flexible cartilage skeleton helps to make the manta a graceful, powerful swimmer.

Slowly flapping their two large fins like wings, mantas “fly” under the water.

## Eating on the Run

Mantas eat tiny plants and animals called **plankton**. The manta uses fins on the sides of its mouth to guide plankton into its big mouth while it swims.



*Mantas swim with their mouths wide open when they feed.*



## Friendly Giants

Mantas may be big, but they are gentle. They are curious. They will sometimes swim near human divers, and even let the divers reach out and touch them. A manta's tail looks scary, but it is harmless and will not sting a diver.

## Big Babies

When a female manta mates, her baby grows in an egg that hatches inside her. Later the baby is born, rolled up in its fins. It uncurls these fins, then swims away. At first, the baby stays close to shore. But soon it will fly through the ocean and leap and somersault above the waves.